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ABSTRACT

A research project used a Cornell University library search, online computer catalogs, the Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) database back to 1967, government publications, and Dissertation Abstracts International for the Social Sciences for the past 30 years to investigate the Federal Government's role in working to solve adult illiteracy problems. The search found that for more than 2 decades, the Federal Government has taken a measure of responsibility for adult education, its principal effort being the Adult Education Act through which Adult Basic Education (ABE), Adult Secondary Education (ASE), and English-as-a-Second Language (ESL) programs are offered. The government's ABE program began in 1964 under the Economic Opportunity Act. Another program, Right to Read, began operating in 1971, but was declared a failure 6 years after it began. The Adult Literacy Initiative was established in the Reagan Administration to encourage volunteer programs of literacy tutoring and to make literacy a national priority. Funding for adult literacy programs has grown steadily, but still falls short of meeting the need. The literature also suggests that although volunteer efforts have been very helpful, a trained professional force of literacy educators is needed. The study concluded that an effort coordinated and "energized" by the Federal Government would stand a greater chance of success than the small and fragmented programs that now exist. (77 references) (KC)

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The Federal Government's Role in Trying to Solve the Adult Illiteracy Problem: The Current Situation and Proposed Solutions

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April 1990

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INTRODUCTION

Adult illiteracy is no longer a hidden problem in the United States. In 1977, a high school graduate sued his former school system because he was unable to read and write; his lawyer referred to adult illiteracy as a national disease (NYT, 4/24/77). Cinema and television have begun tackling the issue of illiteracy. The 1989 movie "Stanley and Iris" and the television promotion Project Literacy U.S. (PLUS) are two examples. Local Literacy Volunteers of America programs are sponsoring community "read-a-thons." Books such as Jonathan Kozol's *Illiterate America* have made the popular market. Congress has held several hearings on adult illiteracy and related problems since 1982 (see References Cited), and passed joint resolutions designating September 1986 as "Adult Literacy Awareness Month" (Public Law 99-406) and July 2, 1988, as "National Literacy Day" (Public Law 100-363). And many scholarly articles have been published on the subject during the past decade. The Southport Institute for Policy Analysis, for example, sponsored a "Project on Adult Literacy" that spawned seven papers. These actions show that, as Alamprese (1989) suggested, the problem has attracted the attention of the public, politicians, and policymakers. Chisman (1989) called adult literacy a "hot topic" and high priority for politicans, business leaders, and others.

The word "literacy" is used in many different contexts. Newspapers, books, professional articles, and Congressional hearings talk of scientific, geographic, computer, cultural, technological, civic, and many other types of literacy (Nickerson, 1985; U.S. House of Representatives, 1987b; AAAS, 1989). With the possible exception of cultural literacy, it seems evident that to possess the other sorts of literacy, one must be able to read and write.

The inability to arrive at a consensual definition of literacy has been a major stumbling block toward the unification of national, state, private, and other literacy efforts in the United States. Lack of a definition prevents even knowing how many people in the United States lack literacy skills. For example, depending on the definition used, numbers of illiterate adult Americans range from 0.5% of the population to 84 million individuals (USBC, 1982-1983; Kozol, 1985b).

Hunter and Harman (1979) distinguished two types of literacy. They defined conventional literacy as "the ability to read, write, and comprehend texts on familiar subjects and to understand whatever signs, labels, instructions, and directions are necessary to get along within one's environment." Functional literacy is more of an externally defined notion, "the possession of skills *perceived as necessary by particular persons and groups* to fulfill their own self-determined objectives as family and community members, citizens, consumers, job-holders, and members of social, religious, or other associations of their choosing. This includes the ability to obtain information they want and to use [it] for their own and others' well-being...to read and write adequately to satisfy the requirements *they set for themselves* as being important for their own lives...to deal positively with demands made on them by society; and...to solve the problems they face in their daily lives" (emphasis in original).

This paper defines literacy as possession of those basic skills that Hunter and Harman (1979) have referred to as conventional literacy. Illiteracy, then, is the absence of conventional literacy.

Several writers have described impacts of illiteracy in terms of political, economic, social, and personal factors.

Literacy is viewed by some researchers as a political phenomenon (Fingeret, 1984; Kazemek, 1988). Kazemek (1988) noted that Americans have assumed they can worry only about the mechanics of literacy education and ignore its political implications. He saw President Reagan's formation of the Adult Literacy Initiative (which he then refused to fund) as a political act with serious implications for literacy education. To Kazemek such an act led to distortion of political and social reality by blaming the victim for his or her poverty, lack of education, or unemployment, rather than blaming the political and economic systems that limit employment and education for disadvantaged persons (Kazemek, 1988). Ohmann (1976) wondered why social change was not taking place to create full literacy, and if those who are in control of the economic and educational systems in the United States really desire a totally literate work force since there are too few jobs to go around. A democracy becomes weak when large numbers of its citizens are impeded from full participation in public life (Nickerson, 1985; Chisman, 1989). Implicit in literacy education is the potential to change the relationship between individuals, groups, and society as well as the distribution of knowledge, leading newly literate individuals and groups to demand a new social status (Fingeret, 1984).

The illiteracy problem has also been linked to the position of the United States in the world economy (IRA, 1988; Alamprese, 1989; Chisman, 1989; Pierce, 1989) and to maintenance of the current U.S. standard of living. Pierce (1989) stressed that the increase in both national and international competitiveness in the last decade could lead adult illiteracy to become a concern of national economic survival. Sticht (1984) described the view of literacy by the Reagan administration as differing from that of earlier

presidential administrations. The former view was that adults have a right to read and that literacy is an end in itself. Today literacy is seen as a means to other goals, including improved national security and greater economic prosperity.

Illiteracy may also create problems in the workplace. Delker and Yakowicz (1989) wrote of "employee errors and low productivity, industrial accidents, poor product quality, and remedial training programs" which, they say, add billions of dollars annually to workplace expenses. Despite these concerns, Chisman (1989) wrote that, paradoxically, most public and private literacy programs are not available to employed persons but only to the unemployed or other disadvantaged groups.

Kozol (1985b) focused on the high price paid by the U.S. military. The Navy, for example, reported that one recruit was responsible for $250,000 worth of damage to equipment because of his inability to read the repair manual.

Illiteracy is also a societal problem, since it "promotes the kinds of inequities that fuel social conflict, disorder, and discontent" (Nickerson, 1985). Carroll and Chall (1975) also saw illiteracy as closely tied to other social problems. They indicated that plans for attacking crime, poverty, and other societal concerns must include an attack on illiteracy.

Freeman and Kassebaum (1966), Coles (1976), Kozol (1980), Jones (1981), Diekhoff and Diekhoff (1984), Nickerson (1985), and Delker and Yakowicz (1989) wrote of the costs of illiteracy to the individual. Kozol (1980) noted that illiterate persons may devise defense mechanisms to prevent discovery by others. Freeman and Kassebaum (1966) indicated that a wide variety of problems arises when a substantial number of people in a social system lack

adequate facility to participate in the communication process and thus have insufficient comprehension of what is communicated. To survive, such individuals must employ techniques that require only a few language symbols; in addition, when societal values allow these persons to survive, the society permits the establishment of differential techniques on the part of these actors. Under such conditions these individuals, in part, develop their own cultural system.

Diekhoff and Diekhoff (1984) noted the financial costs of adult illiteracy to the individual. Seventy-five percent of adult illiterates earned less than $5,000 annually in 1982, and the unemployment rate among this group is notably higher than that in the literate population.

Delker and Yakowicz (1989) discussed the effects on the children of illiterates. Their parents cannot help them develop necessary learning skills, are less likely to interact with or intervene in the education system, and these children are also likely to lack access to printed materials in the home.

Chisman (1989) stressed that before the adult illiteracy problem can be solved, Americans must be aware of the following: (1) school reform is not the answer, since illiterate adults are already out of school; (2) business involvement alone is not enough to solve the problem, although there should be a partnership between the private and public sectors; (3) use of technology as a teaching aid is not as dehumanizing as some view it, but neither can it wholly substitute for human teachers; (4) there is no one ideal method of literacy instruction, so the national literacy effort must remain pluralistic. Chisman believed that the measures needed to address the adult illiteracy problem in the short term would neither be particularly expensive nor

difficult compared with the actions required to solve other major economic and social problems.

METHODS

Clearly, there are many dimensions to the problem of adult illiteracy and to why it persists despite several federal, many state and local, and work-place literacy programs nationwide. Questions of funding, recruitment and retention of students, modes of instruction, quality of teaching, federal policy, technology, and others must be considered before the problem can be solved. Time and space constraints prohibited a thorough examination of all of these factors. For this reason, I focused on the question of basic skills provision by the federal government, excluding English as a Second Language (ESL) and other programs aimed at special target groups such as prison inmates. To accomplish this objective, I consulted articles and books published between 1960 and the present. Several questions were asked: What is currently being done? What do the authors of these publications recommend be done by the federal government, both in the form of new actions and improvements on current programs? This paper will concentrate mostly on Adult Basic Education and the Adult Literacy Initiative; other programs are mentioned only as they interact and relate to these.

This study resulted from a library search conducted on the Cornell University campus. Materials were obtained from the online computer catalog and the complete card catalog of the Cornell libraries, a search of the ERIC database back to 1967, a search of the online computer system of the U.S. Government Printing Office, and a computerized search of the Dissertation Abstracts International for the Social Sciences over the past 30 years. Some references were located using annotated bibliographies on adult literacy and

illiteracy (Ward, 1961; Kazemek and Rigg, 1984; French, 1987). Selected materials deemed to be of high relevance were obtained through interlibrary loan or by writing to particular organizations. More than two hundred publications were examined; the final selection of books and articles to use in writing the paper was made after a preliminary review of all items.

FEDERAL ADULT LITERACY PROGRAMS

DESCRIPTION

For more than two decades the federal government has taken a measure of responsibility for adult education, its principal effort being the Adult Education Act through which Adult Basic Education (ABE), Adult Secondary Education (ASE), and English as a Second Language (ESL) programs are offered. The two other major efforts, Right to Read and the Adult Literacy Initiative, whose goals included making Americans aware of the extent of the illiteracy problem, began in 1971 and 1983, respectively. Right to Read per se no longer exists.

Adult Basic Education

While the first federal funds for literacy programs were made available in 1918 under the Immigration and Nationality Act, the U.S. government's Adult Basic Education program began in 1964 with the passage of the Economic Opportunity Act (EOA) (Title IIB). Previous programs had excluded millions of adults from participation because of specific age, physical, or geographical requirements, or because they lacked sufficient education to begin the program. The EOA offered basic education to "persons 18 years old and older whose inability to read or write the English language constitutes a substantial impairment of their ability to obtain or retain employment" (Cook,

1971; NACAE, 1976). Under the EOA, the Office of Economic Opportunity gave grants to states to help pay for local educational agency programs for teaching adults, including acquisition of information on what materials and methods would be needed for such programs. Each state was required to submit a plan to provide for program administration by the state educational agency. Funds were distributed to states based on the relative number of persons 18 or older in each state who had completed five or fewer grades of school or the equivalent.

In 1966, Congress passed the Adult Education Act (Title III of the 1966 Amendments to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act), thus transferring the Adult Education program to the U.S. Office of Education. Its stated purpose closely resembled that of EOA, with the addition of "...and to become more productive and responsible citizens." Amendments of 1970 changed the definition of adult from 18 to 16 years and gave ABE students the opportunity to work toward high school diplomas or equivalency certificates (NACAE, 1976). Adult basic education programs as created under the EOA have persisted for 26 years. Amendments of various years have changed levels of allotments, created state advisory councils, changed eligibility for receipt of grants, etc. Despite these changes, the act's basic purpose remains the same.

According to Fingeret (1984), the Adult Education Act views literacy as a set of skills and sees illiteracy as a cause of many of the problems encountered by poor or minority persons. The belief is that literacy instruction can change an individual's socioeconomic and cultural status. Adult Basic Education (ABE) program goals imply that all adults should be literate to function as productive members of society. Mezirow et al. (1975) used a gambling metaphor, referring to ABE as the only game in town for those

"taking a last chance on education." In 1965, 37,991 individuals participated in adult basic education; today more than 3.1 million participate each year, an increase of more than 700% (Alamprese, 1989; Pierce, 1989).

Right to Read

The Right to Read program began operating in 1971. In his address to the 1969 Annual Convention of the National Association of State Boards of Education, former Assistant Secretary of Education James E. Allen, Jr., stated that more than a quarter of Americans either could not read or had very limited reading skills (Allen, 1969). He stated that: "we should immediately set for ourselves the goal of assuring that by the end of the 1970's the right to read shall be a reality for all--that no one shall be leaving our schools without the skill and the desire necessary to read to the full limits of his capability." In the 1970s Right to Read, under the Office of Education, funded several programs that served adult readers (U.S. Office of Education, 1974).

Right to Read combined federal, state, private, and local contributions. Its goals were (1) to focus national attention on the numbers of functionally illiterate adults and children in the United States; (2) to encourage all levels of government, private industry, foundations, etc., to improve reading instruction for all groups; and (3) to disseminate information on the current status of literacy education, including successful programs and up-to-date research. In 1974, the Right to Read program established adult reading academies, which were envisioned as a "Peace Corps for Literacy," utilizing volunteers to tutor illiterate adults. In 1976, about $5 million was distributed among approximately 80 reading academies (U.S. Office of Education, 1974; Hunter and Harman, 1979). Unfortunately, the program was

declared a failure by its director six years after it began (Kolenbrander, 1986).

Adult Literacy Initiative

In 1983 President Reagan announced the creation of the Adult Literacy Initiative to be carried out by the U.S. Department of Education. Kolenbrander (1986) wrote his Ph.D. dissertation on the Reagan administration's attempt to encourage business to help adult illiterates. From the beginning of his presidency, Ronald Reagan worked to reduce the size and scope of federal government involvement in domestic affairs, including education. Toward this end, the administration sought to increase volunteer participation in performing many of the functions the government had handled since the New Deal era. The Adult Literacy Initiative grew out of this view. Kolenbrander (1986) wrote that the public awareness campaign was one of the most important components of the Reagan Administration's policy toward adult illiteracy. The belief was that once state leaders became aware of the problem, they would establish literacy programs, that the public would volunteer to tutor, and that the private sector would also provide support.

The initiative's goal included the following: (1) national campaign to promote awareness, recruit volunteers, and encourage business to fund literacy programs; (2) formation of the National Adult Literacy Project (NALP) to provide program support to public and private organizations offering literacy training; (3) establishment of state and local adult literacy councils; (4) assignment of college work study students to adult literacy programs; (5) assignment of college credit to college students who did literacy tutoring, and encouragement of student voluntarism; (6) promotion of networking between special education, vocational education, rehabilitation, and adult education

communities to benefit out-of-school youth and disabled adults; (7) establishment of the Federal Employee Literacy Training Program (FELT) to provide a group of federal employee literacy volunteers and make space available for tutoring; and (8) volunteer and private sector support and establishment of private and public sector partnerships in literacy education (Vines, 1983; Adult Literacy Initiative, 1984; Crandall et al., 1984; Delker, 1984; Kolenbrander, 1986).

Delker (1984) saw the development of the initiative as the result of three converging phenomena: a new level of awareness of the extent and seriousness of the illiteracy problem; an assessment of state and local ability to support an increased adult literacy effort; and a commitment to the potential of the public-private-volunteer coalition to promote adult literacy. This was the first time that the federal government had declared adult literacy a national priority.

STATED PROBLEMS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT

Much of the literature concerned with the problem of adult illiteracy in the United States today focused on the Adult Basic Education program. Clearly, ABE, which has programs in every state, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, Guam, the Virgin Islands, and the Pacific Trust Territories (Mezirow et al., 1975), has a foundation for success. The fact that so many articles and books mentioned ABE and made suggestions for its improvement indicates that the United States government would not need to start from scratch to develop a successful federal adult literacy program. Delker and Yakowicz (1989) wrote that "With more than twenty years of literacy and basic education experience upon which to draw, there is some understanding of what

works, what does not, and what is needed in the field...a wide-ranging network of federal, state, and related agencies could be mobilized to strengthen literacy efforts."

Among the sources consulted, several concerns emerged.

Need for a Federal Policy on Adult Literacy

NACAE (1972) listed several questions that needed answering before a clear federal adult education policy could be established: Why should the federal government support adult education? If the government cannot make a national commitment for all U.S. adults, which target groups should be given priority and why? What should be the extent of the federal commitment to these groups? Should federal adult education be limited to unemployed adults or should it be available to anyone wishing it as part of the general welfare of U.S. citizens? Should federal adult education programs be only employment-oriented or should they also offer general life enrichment activities separate from employment? Is adult education so important to national well-being that funding should include subsistence and other support services? The NACAE report concluded that six federally funded programs answering each of the above issues were already in existence but that there was no established national policy, priority, or uniformity. NACAE saw the first task for the federal government as establishment of a policy that would include national goals, a list of federally supported activities, and the specified target population for these programs.

Delker (1984) reminded Americans that education is constitutionally the responsibility of the states and that federal laws and policies should be designed to help states meet this responsibility. The 1978 Amendments to the Adult Education Act spelled out explicitly processes by which states were to

provide services to all adults. Kozol (1985a), however, referred to state responsibility as a myth. He said that education can no longer be a local matter since textbooks, curricula, and many tests are nationally produced.

Several authors (GAO, 1975; Hunter and Harman, 1979; Delker, 1984; Sticht, 1984; Nickerson, 1985; Brizius, 1989; Chisman, 1989; Pierce, 1989) recognized the need for a stated national policy on adult literacy, whether or not they believed the major onus should be borne by the states.

In a 1975 report to Congress, the Government Accounting Office (GAO) noted that the Office of Education did not know if it was making sufficient progress in reducing adult illiteracy because it had established no realistic and measurable goals. Pierce (1989) recommended either the consolidation of programs into an existing federal agency, creation of an independent agency on adult literacy, or a strengthening of the existing structure. Sticht (1984) said that educational policies (federal, state, and local) must be reviewed to find the best ways to encourage transmission of literacy from one generation to the next.

Coordination Between Programs

Fragmentation. Adult literacy programs are funded by Congress through several different governmental agencies (see Pierce, 1989 for names). This overlap and redundancy of effort leads to gaps between and within programs, wasted funds, competition between agencies for participants, and prevents sharing of new ideas.

Responsibility for basic skills training is divided among several levels of government, including the departments of Education, Labor, and Health and Human Services (which have major programs) and other departments with

responsibilities for adult education (Chisman, 1989). Chisman (1989) stated that there is almost no lobby for literacy due to institutional fragmentation. Each federal agency that has responsibility for adult education has always put it low on its list of priorities.

Linkages. Several authors (GAO, 1975; NACAE, 1976, 1978; Boorstin, 1984; Butler et al., 1985; Manning, 1988) saw the importance of coordinating federal programs, educational and other, that affect illiterate adults. Increased linkage among federal government agencies could also reduce waste, identify and coordinate successful programs, and lead to more effective communication among all providers of adult literacy training (Kolenbrander, 1986). In addition to coordination within and among federal programs, a need was seen for a strong and continuing partnership between literacy agencies and government at the federal, state, and local levels, as well as cooperation between the public and private sectors (Thiel, 1984; Venezky et al., 1987). NACAE (1983) proposed to determine where adult education efforts overlapped and to encourage increased cooperation between existing resources. In 1985, they recommended that the Department of Education, along with NACAE, establish ways to strengthen relationships with other federal agencies providing funding for adult education programs. This would help maximize the use of scarce federal dollars (NACAE, 1985).

Chisman (1989) suggested that the federal government establish the position of Assistant Secretary of Education for Adult Literacy. This person would be responsible for the ABE Even Start (see U.S. House of Representatives, 1986a) programs and for coordinating basic skills services in the Department of Education. Other sources recommended that the President establish a cabinet council on adult literacy to coordinate federal efforts

with the aim of getting the most out of existing programs and beginning new ones (IRA, 1983; Brizius, 1989; Chisman, 1989).

Linkages with work-force programs. Many authors (Duggan, 1985; Nickerson, 1985; IRA, 1988; Brizius, 1989; Chisman, 1989; Delker and Yakowicz, 1989) emphasized the importance of workplace literacy and/or the need to focus national attention on basic skills of the work force. Butler et al. (1985) focused on the "literacy-employment equation," calling for visible White House support and saying that the federal government should be responsible for implementation of oversight for literacy and employment and training.

Nickerson (1985) pointed out that the difficulties that some federally funded job training programs have had in keeping trainees during training and retaining them in jobs afterwards might be partly explained by the small basic education component in most of these programs. He suggested that such programs would benefit from developing strong basic skills components for their trainees. Campbell and Sechler (1987) urged ABE practitioners to increase linkages with vocational education by awarding Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA) funds to projects that demonstrate such linkages. NACAE (1974) suggested that federal and state agencies should develop a mechanism for allowing illiterate adults working on basic skills in preparation for job training programs to receive unemployment benefits. Campbell and Sechler (1987) also recommended that federal and state agencies develop a system for defining "dire need" cases to support ABE and vocational education training for those who should be provided cost of living subsidies. They said that the government should also consider changing the Adult Education Act formula for funding to distribute financial support based on degree of illiteracy of adults and their lack of job skills. Federal and

state policy for funding should (1) use performance as the criterion for funding adult training programs; (2) define more clearly what is meant by "those most in need" and fund on those criteria; and (3) have each state develop criteria for funding that will include how goals and programs will prepare illiterate adults for job training.

Linkages with welfare programs. NACAE (1974) recommended that the state agency that administers ABE develop cooperative agreements with state welfare and public assistance agencies to provide increased educational opportunities for those persons on welfare or public assistance. Mikulecky (1986) suggested that the government consider requiring illiterate adults on welfare to enter educational programs.

Linkages with the correctional system. Vines (1983) mentioned the idea of developing a proposal for judges on "alternative service in literacy--either in or out of correctional facilities." She said service in literacy as an alternative to prison might be a way to expand the pool of resources. Mikulecky (1986) recommended that the government consider shortening prison sentences for illiterate adults who succeed in reading programs. The Adult Literacy Initiative also intended to work more closely with the Departments of Labor and Justice to coordinate efforts in job training programs and correctional facilities.

Funding

Need to increase. Pierce (1989) described what he called a gradual growth curve in federal funding for literacy. Between 1966 and 1989 the amount allocated grew from $20.7 million to $162 million, a 770% increase. But, on average, only about 40% of the authorized funds have been

appropriated. In 1986, the U.S. Department of Education reported a total expenditure of $405 million for an adult student population of approximately 3.1 million. This allowed more than 75,000 adult teaching and administrative personnel and more than 100,000 volunteers for literacy programs in every state and most local school and community college districts.

Despite these increases, NACAE (1974), GAO (1975), Weber (1975), Thiel (1984), Fields (1985), Kozol (1985a), Venezky et al. (1987), Kazemek (1988), McCune (1988), Chisman (1989), and others stated simply that more federal funds must be spent to solve the illiteracy problem. Two authors (NACAE, 1974; IRA, 1983) suggested quadrupling and doubling, respectively, the current levels of ABE funding.

While private donations and grant monies have helped many successful literacy programs, they are not a substitute for governmental commitment, nor can such programs rely on the tenuousness of such funds (Venezky et al., 1987; Kazemek, 1988). Brizius (1989) specifically recommended that ABE receive a higher priority. Thiel (1984) added that since federal deficits are likely to preclude additional funding for literacy, incentives for states to make larger contributions should be increased.

Weber (1975), Chisman (1989), and Pierce (1989) noted that actual funding has fallen far short of the amount authorized by the legislation. For example, in fiscal year 1973, the federal government authorized $225 million for ABE, but only $61.3 million was actually appropriated (Weber, 1975). Pierce (1989) argued that placement of adult education programs in the Department of Education has affected the program's funding level. In other words, more funds given to adults means less money for children--and support for children will win out.

Kazemek (1988) stressed that local and state governments and especially the federal government should be responsible for providing adequate support for effective, professional programs. Americans must demand sufficient funding for adult literacy education. Kozol (1985a) said that solving the literacy problem does not come down to a choice between federal support and corporate commitment, nor between federal money and the local library or local volunteer. Without enormous amounts of startup funding, volunteers cannot *be* used.

Fields (1985) lamented the Reagan Administration's "lip service only" approach to adult illiteracy, which has used influence instead of money to try to solve the problem. On the one hand, the government announced the Adult Literacy Initiative, whose goal was elimination of adult functional illiteracy in the United States. On the other hand, the government was trying to eliminate funding for many of the programs seen as being most effective in the struggle against illiteracy.

Areas in need of funding. Authors mentioned various areas that should be funded. GAO (1975) called for diagnosis and counseling to determine individuals' learning problems; Alamprese (1989) recommended spending money on research and policy analysis; Xerox (1967) encouraged funding of local programs for at least three years to allow for effective planning and establishment of guidelines relating to reallocation of resources within state and local programs; Brizius (1989) encouraged establishment of coordinating and planning organizations; and Fingeret (1984) said funds should be spent for increased supervision and administration of voluntary literacy programs. The Working Group on Adult Literacy (IRA, 1988) called for increases in federal funding for both the development and maintenance of networks to coordinate

state and local programs, along with a special $10 million annual program to help train volunteers and nonprofit efforts.

Professionalization of the Adult Literacy Work Force

Use of volunteers. While many studies applauded and encouraged the efforts of volunteers, most felt that volunteers alone could not solve the illiteracy problem (Harman, 1984; Kazemek, 1988; Chisman, 1989; Delker and Yakowicz, 1989; Pierce, 1989; and others).

While volunteers allow scarce funds to go farther and permit greater numbers of adults to enter literacy programs, volunteers are often poorly trained, receive little guidance and support, and are not held accountable for poor results (Pierce, 1989). It was generally concluded that volunteers should be used as secondary rather than primary service providers. Brizius (1989) urged the President of the United States to point out that voluntary efforts alone will not even solve a small part of the adult basic skills problem in the United States.

Need for teacher training. General concern was expressed about the lack of experience and training of adult literacy instructors (Mezirow et al., 1975; Fingeret, 1984; Butler et al., 1985; Phillips et al., 1985; Manning, 1988; Pierce, 1989). Several years of study and training are required for a person to become an effective elementary or secondary school teacher, yet most volunteers and part-time teachers of adults typically receive less than 12 hours of orientation (Chall et al., 1987; Kazemek, 1988; Delker and Yakowicz, 1989). Phillips et al. (1985) reported that many literacy providers were "relying on worn-out slogans, ideas, and teaching techniques...were forced to fall back on hunches, their own formal school experience...often had limited

access to resources, were isolated from others with similar problems and were faced with feelings of bewilderment when trying to operate a program for adult learners." To help resolve this problem they proposed a training model that would consist of (1) training for administrators, involving setting up, adapting, improving, or revising a literacy program, and (2) training for people in charge of staff development for their own local literacy programs. Chisman (1989) called on Congress to enact the Adult Basic Education Act of 1989, which would include creation of a literacy leader training program to encourage more young people to make adult literacy a full-time career. He also suggested that, on an experimental basis, a $10 million literacy leader training fund should be established whose purpose would be to augment the number of highly qualified, full-time adult basic skills teachers.

Kazemek (1988) said that the task of adult education teachers is difficult since many adult learners have already experienced failure elsewhere and thus bring with them emotional and psychological distress. He added that lack of adequate funding appears to guarantee a lack of professionalism. "The fact that most of ABE's 41,000 paid instructors are moonlighting elementary and secondary teachers who have 'no special training in teaching adults' should be a serious issue to those of us involved in adult literacy education."

Pierce (1989) noted that only minimal professionalism has developed during the 25 years of the adult basic education act. For example, as of 1987, only <u>one</u> American institution offered a bachelor's degree in adult basic education, and only 54 institutions out of 1,872 that offer teacher education focused on some type of adult education program.

Part-time work force. Pierce (1989) noted that the lack of a full-time, specifically trained teaching force contributes to problems faced by adult learners. The part-time structure of ABE programs, lack of personnel to train staff, and the idea of adult literacy efforts as temporary in nature has led to the lack of professionalism (Harman, 1984; Alamprese, 1989). Today's ABE programs are staffed largely by part-time instructors, many of whom are former elementary or secondary education teachers with little training in ABE teaching strategies; hence, staff turnover is usually high. Alamprese (1989) recommended further investigation of many of these aspects, including the relationship between program structure and its ability to hire and retain staff.

Need for increased support for teachers. Several researchers (Mezirow et al., 1975; Chall et al., 1987; Pierce, 1989) mentioned the lack of support systems built into adult basic education programs. Pierce (1989) said that teachers and administrators need in-service programs, an understanding of how students learn, and a specialized group of people to develop improved curriculum materials.

Fingeret (1984) suggested that the leadership for policy and programming changes must come from within the literacy community itself, and that literacy leaders need to get involved in the political process by developing networks.

Location of ABE within the Department of Education

According to Pierce (1989), the placement of the adult basic education program within the Department of Education, an agency dedicated to educating children and youth, was unsound and led to minimal attention to adult education. The administrators and educators in the Department of Education

are not trained to work with the problems of adults since they have backgrounds in primary, secondary, and postsecondary education. The needs of millions of adults have thus been left in the hands of "minimally attentive" federal policymakers and decisionmakers. This has led ABE to be only a minor part of the services offered by most local educational agencies (GAO, 1975) and has prevented ABE from developing a unique, professional identity outside the school system; instead it has merely imitated the existing elementary and secondary education system (Xerox, 1967). Pierce (1989) suggested consolidating all federal adult literacy programs into a new agency at the sub-cabinet level, located outside the Department of Education.

Recruitment and Retention of Learners

Identification of the target population. NACAE (1978) suggested that instead of using the U.S. Census definition of a target population (defined by the 1970 census as adults 16 years or older with less than a high school diploma) to assess need, a "demand population" should be used. They defined the demand population as "adults 16 years and older experiencing personal and social disadvantage due to inadequate basic education who actually want, demand, and are capable of using adult education."

Several authors stressed the necessity of aiming programs at those who are the most in need, especially the illiterate poor (Xerox, 1967; NACAE, 1974; Campbell and Sechler, 1987); since the illiterate poor do not tend to be reached, ABE is not serving its stated goals of reaching the neediest (Thiel, 1984).

Hunter and Harman (1979) distinguished four groups of adults who may need literacy instruction. Group 1 consists of "secure and self-directed

persons who respond well to group activities as well as to individualized instruction and are open to recruitment through the media." Group 2 members are "less economically and personally secure--those with large families and seasonal jobs, who must often work overtime...have suffered some of the consequences of undereducation and underemployment and yet are eager learners capable of quickly achieving specific goals they set for themselves to improve their daily lives." Groups 3 and 4 contain those persons who have failed to make it in society. Group 3 members are only sporadically employed in low-paying, short-term jobs and need individualized recruitment contacts and one-on-one instruction. Group 4 consists of those most in need yet with least access to service, the stationary poor; this group also requires one-on-one instruction and can only be reached by intensive attention.

Hunter and Harman considered existing literacy programs to be valid mostly for adults in Group 1 since these individuals find more traditional patterns of schooling "congenial." They recommended that ABE administrators and others running similar programs concentrate on this group since they are appropriate clients of existing programs. Members of Group 2 are also appropriate potential clients; many more would ask for help if the "stigma of illiteracy were lessened through public efforts to demonstrate that it is not unique and that others have overcome illiteracy and thereby improved their lives" (Hunter and Harman, 1979). They felt that great efforts were already being made to reach the people in Groups 1 and 2. Therefore, they focused their specific recommendations on persons in Groups 3 and 4. They suggested that a major new initiative was needed that would provide true alternatives to schooling by establishment of pluralistic community-based programs.

Reaching the target population. While the federal adult education program has taken some positive steps, it has successfully reached only a fraction of adults needing it (GAO, 1975; Weber, 1975; IRA, 1988; Alamprese, 1989). Weber (1975) saw the main limitation as insufficient interest, mobilization, and funds for both organizing and sustaining programs. Fingeret (1975) noted that most U.S. literacy programs are individually oriented and reach only the most mobile adults. Mezirow et al. (1975) made several suggestions for improving recruitment of hard-to-reach individuals. One idea was to relate participation in ABE to programs and services of which undereducated adults are recipients, such as welfare or employment programs. Some of these programs provide a small stipend for participants, which could work as an incentive. Other enticements might include child-care facilities, allowances, or payment for subway or bus fares. Outreach classes could be used to reach the poorest and least-educated individuals, who are often unwilling or unable to attend classes outside of their own neighborhood.

Xerox (1967) concluded that the ABE program needed to undergo considerable change in order to eventually meet the true needs of the target population. The ideal program would allow adults to achieve greater self-realization and should address subjects of interest to adults, such as home and family living, occupational training, social, community and part-time occupational activities, community action, and public service.

Prevention of program dropouts. As many as 30 to 60% of ABE participants drop out of programs before completion (Hunter and Harman, 1979; Diekhoff and Diekhoff, 1984), and some estimates indicate that up to 50% may leave within a short period without significant improvement in their skills (Alamprese, 1989). While students often drop out of ABE programs, their

reasons for doing so are not clearly understood. The "logical" reasons given for dropping out include health problems, lack of day care, family problems, transportation, lack of interest, time constraints, etc. The 55.4% of participants who leave for "other" reasons do not specify their reason (Delker and Yakowicz, 1989). Brizius (1989) suggested that basic skills programs receive adequate funding and be sufficiently organized that they can offer support services to adults to help them stay in the program, such as child care, transportation, and other services.

A few writers said that the basic outlook of literacy programs can lead to increased dropout rates. Rigg and Kazemek (1983), for example, asserted that many programs assume that illiteracy is a major cause of poverty, unemployment, or crime and that acquisition of literacy will solve all of these problems. Second, such programs view illiteracy as some kind of disease (witness the use of such terminology as "reading diagnosis" and "prescriptions" for literacy activities and materials). This second assumption translates as "illiteracy is the adult's own fault." Such assumptions lead to programs whose teachers aim to do something to and for adult learners, trying to "treat" whatever is "wrong" with the student. The problem is that such assumptions ignore the adult's goals and plans, believing that the teacher knows what the adult needs to know and how he or she can best learn. Sticht (1984) noted that the idea of illiteracy as a condition that can be "cured" or "stamped out" has led to many quick-fix programs that offer limited hours of remedial literacy training. Such programs, which often exist without political, governmental, or general public support, have brought limited educational and socioeconomic returns to the few adults who participate in them.

Kazemek (1988) spoke of basic misperceptions that are held about literacy. One is that adults who are learning to read and write have the same needs as children. A second misperception is that literacy consists of a group of basic skills that all literate adults have or should have. When adult beginning readers are viewed, consciously or unconsciously, as "illiterate others" as opposed to the "literate self," then literacy instruction may be seen as a process by which those who are endowed transfer information and skills to those who lack them. Kazemek suggested that literacy instruction might better be seen as a "dialogic" process in which one adult helps another to "do what he or she wants and needs to do."

Mezirow et al. (1975) and Diekhoff and Diekhoff (1984) talked of the high attrition rates of literacy and other ABE programs; 80% of ABE administrators in a 1975 poll listed it as a major obstacle to the success of their programs (Mezirow et al., 1975). Diekhoff and Diekhoff (1984) discussed two approaches that have been used to identify potential dropouts even before students enter a program: (1) Examine demographic characteristics of ABE dropouts versus persisters. Previous studies have found that they differed on several characteristics. (2) Measure congruence between students' characteristics and ABE program characteristics. For example, do the students come from the same socioeconomic, racial, and cultural background as the teachers? Once likely dropouts were identified, special counseling could be undertaken to aid in persistence in the program. Chall et al. (1987) reported that various studies of students who dropped out had included among their major reasons program deficiencies, lack of an adequate environment for learning, and lack of a sense of community.

Use of Technology

General. In an overview of issues presented at the National Adult Literacy Conference, Sticht (1984) mentioned the need to better understand the use of technology in developing and carrying out adult literacy programs. In this case, technology is considered to include television, radio, and computers as well as technology for instructional systems development.

Nickerson (1985) reported on a workshop sponsored by the Adult Literacy Initiative to determine how technology might be used in teaching reading, writing, and other related skills to adults. Information technology, defined as "technology applied to the problems of representing, storing, processing, and transmitting information," can help in the development of more effective methods of literacy instruction. Nickerson pointed out that seeing technology in this way is rather paradoxical considering that television and radio have provided alternatives to reading, thereby lessening our reliance on printed material. Nickerson proposed several uses for information technology in the fight against illiteracy: (1) as an alternative to print literacy for acquiring and conveying information; (2) to help develop tools to help illiterate persons use print to communicate, at least to some degree; and (3) as a medium of instruction, a teacher aid, or for self-instruction (Nickerson, 1985).

Computers. Phillips et al. (1985) remarked that lack of knowledge about the potential of computer technology as well as lack of research information leads to pedagogical and ethical questions about this form of instruction. In light of this, they recommended the identification of approaches that successfully use technology in adult education, then using these approaches to develop training modules to broaden the use of technology in adult literacy

instruction.

Although several researchers viewed computer-assisted literacy instruction as a means of increasing availability of instruction, few technological approaches are currently being used in adult literacy programs (Nickerson, 1985; Chisman, 1989; Pierce, 1989). Reasons for this include expense of computer systems, lack of appropriate materials (most have been aimed at children), and difficulty in selecting a system that meets one's needs (Nickerson, 1985; Phillips et al., 1985). Chisman (1989) believed that the principal problem with technology was probably the lack of experience in how best to use computers, as well as how to evaluate the different learning systems that are available. Advantages of computer-assisted instruction include immediate private feedback to the student, self-paced instruction, building of independence, and success in promoting literacy skills, along with unlimited patience, which human instructors cannot promise (Phillips et al., 1985; Chisman, 1989). Video and computer software as teaching media should especially be considered, either in interactive or noninteractive form (Nickerson, 1985). He suggested that teachers and researchers collaborate with computer technologists in developing instructional software, since neither expert fully understands the job of the other. He also recommended that the government help promote the establishment of a facility that would evaluate literacy software and then disseminate the results to prospective users.

A National Center for Adult Literacy could promote innovation in training and technology by awarding grants to state and local governments for investments in these areas; this would ensure that existing technology is available to all who can benefit from it (Chisman, 1989).

Television. The National Institute for Interactive Television and ABE (NIITA) (1970) and Marchilonis and Niebuhr (1985) examined uses of television technology in literacy programs. On a federal grant from the Department of Health, Education and Welfare, NIITA determined that new educational technologies were needed in the national attack on illiteracy. Their goal was to demonstrate the present value and future promise of using instructional television in Adult Basic Education programs, along with examining ways in which the "principles of adult learning and motivation can be most effectively integrated in this medium." Marchilonis and Niebuhr (1985) noted that the United States has hardly scratched the surface of the ways in which TV technologies could help combat adult illiteracy. They asked four basic questions: (1) which adults will most likely be reached by television? (2) which can television do better--increase awareness and motivation or give direct instruction? (3) what kinds of programs should be developed and by whom? (4) what needs to be done to involve TV broadcasters in helping solve the problem of adult illiteracy? They noted that, despite the computer craze, federal, state, and local efforts show that people remain interested in using TV programming in adult literacy education. Federal funds are being used to support several adult education programs that use TV for awareness and motivation as well as instruction. Marchilonis and Niebuhr arrived at two sets of conclusions, one pessimistic, one optimistic. The former states that, despite the major role played by electronic media in the lives of Americans, they play a peripheral role in the development of literacy. What is more, the media serve the function of narcotizing and "unmotivating" illiterate viewers. Finally, they suggest that history would indicate that we should not place much hope in getting help from the media. The optimistic conclusion, intended

to motivate literacy workers to cast aside their pessimism and to realize that something can be done within the present context, states that (1) despite realities, literacy workers *have* gotten a toe, if not a whole foot, in the door of electronic media; (2) as cable channels increase in availability and videocassettes and videodiscs become prevalent, opportunities for use of media will increase; (3) it is becoming easier and easier for the average literacy program to obtain access to a cable channel and a VCR; and (4) AM radio, in recent years, has undergone a shift toward human and community development.

Need for a National Database

Several studies (GAO, 1975; NACAE, 1978; Jones, 1981; McGrail, 1984; Alamprese, 1989; Pierce, 1989) pointed out the lack of accurate and complete information on the number of adults who need literacy services as well as data on the number of current participants. It was also noted that there had been two-year gaps in data gathering in the past (NACAE, 1978). GAO (1975) recommended that the Office of Education develop a means of improving both accuracy and timeliness of program statistics since it is important to be able to count the number of adults enrolled in literacy programs and the type of services being provided. More complete data would help in making decisions for future program direction (NACAE, 1978; Alamprese, 1989). Alamprese (1989) said that a single source for obtaining information on all programs would be more efficient than individual federal programs requiring funded agencies to report participant and service data. She specifically noted the need for data on: (1) exact dollar amounts spent on literacy programs, e.g., state programs funded by federal adult education funds, and money spent by local governments and private organizations; (2) program impact; reports now are often based on

instructors' estimates of effects on learners rather than on systematically collected information; and (3) retention rate. McGrail (1984) wrote that a major attempt to obtain new data on literacy programs should *not* be made in the near future since most groups and organizations that fund and operate literacy programs do not have the kind of data that would be needed for a complete and accurate description of adult literacy services in the United States. She suggested that if program evaluation became a routine part of literacy program operations, the data needed would already have been gathered and summarized.

Need for Further Research

Adult reading and learning process. Fingeret (1984), Phillips et al. (1985), and Manning (1988) discussed the need for increased research on the adult reading and learning process. Although more extensive research has been done since 1977, few studies have focused specifically on the unique characteristics of adult *beginning* readers. Because of limited support for research and development by the government, adult literacy programs have been designed using the same models as those used for children rather than based on research on adult learning and basic skills education. Although the federal government has made some attempts at research and development on adult basic skills education, these efforts have not been well supported or disseminated (Fingeret, 1984). One obstacle to the acquisition of more information on adult illiteracy has been the complexity of the problem. Adult illiterates come from many different backgrounds, and reasons for either avoiding or seeking literacy instruction vary greatly. Fingeret (1984) also called for research on characteristics of illiterate adults, including their strengths;

such research should explore the interaction between the individual, culture, and society. Campbell and Sechler (1987) recommended that research be done on the basic skills necessary for life skills and occupational needs for ABE populations, thus linking ABE with vocational education, which is often the next stage.

Evaluation of literacy programs. GAO (1975), Nickerson (1985), NACAE (1985), and Delker and Yakowicz (1989) suggested that the Department of Education take action to improve the evaluation of literacy programs. The department could sponsor preparation of a report describing what is currently being done in literacy training and summarizing indications of program effectiveness. Such a survey could be useful in helping develop future literacy programs and procedures. If the administration could determine which programs and methods were most effective, that information could be disseminated and states then urged to adopt these programs and methods.

Basic research and development. Pierce (1989) said that some progress has been made in research and development on adult literacy. Between 1966 and 1974 the federal office administering the Adult Education Act conducted a small discretionary research and demonstration program. Section 309 of the Adult Education Act, which was in existence from 1966-1974, funded various basic skills research and development projects, but most of these projects had a limited impact on the quality of literacy programs. Federal funding for Section 309 ended in 1974, and no other consistent support for research and development on basic skills existed until 1988. In that year, the Adult Education Amendments of 1988 appropriated funds under Section 384. However, despite studies on the use of technology in basic skills instruction and in other areas, this research is still only a minor investment. McCune (1988)

suggested that Section 309 of the Adult Education Act should be funded again to support specific activities that would lead to more effective, comprehensive literacy services.

Chisman (1989) blamed much of the current literacy problem on a weak knowledge base that has prevented systematic research or evaluation and dissemination of ideas. Alamprese (1989) and Delker and Yakowicz (1989) stressed the current lack of a national research and development agenda devoted to adult literacy. Delker (1984), Mikulecky (1986), Alamprese (1989), Brizius (1989), and Chisman (1989) recommended the creation of a national center for adult learning (or literacy), responsible for conducting basic and applied research, providing technical assistance to literacy programs and instructors, and monitoring the field for policymakers; it would also require the departments of Labor, Education, and Health and Human Services to set aside major funds for policy research from their existing budgets. Hunter and Harman (1979) recommended that those who were most active in research be brought together to exchange information and devise plans for further research.

Interface Between ABE and the Adult Literacy Initiative

Delker (1984) suggested that the coexistence of the two literacy efforts has created new policy and procedural problems. The Adult Education Act requires states to provide literacy and basic education for adults. It also spells out procedures by which traditional state roles of centralized planning and decisionmaking are endorsed and reinforced.

The Adult Literacy Initiative, on the other hand, stresses decentralized and pluralistic approaches to solving the illiteracy crisis. It encourages

more involvement by volunteers and private agencies. According to Delker (1984), reactions to the initiative by adult literacy administrators have ranged from support to cynicism. It will thus be a major challenge to resolve the tensions between the two efforts. Toward this end, Delker proposed the creation of a national organization to support adult learning generally and adult literacy and basic skills specifically. He believed this organization should be sustained by private sector sources and remain responsive to major adult learning issues and needs.

The Executive Branch

Several sources saw the importance of presidential involvement in the federal literacy effort (Mikulecky, 1986; IRA, 1988; Brizius, 1989; Chisman, 1989). Chisman (1989) recommended that the President appoint a special six-month task force to develop a strategic plan to specify the nation's literacy goals and means of achieving them. The Working Group on Adult Literacy (IRA, 1988) presented a proposal to "the next President of the United States" that would provide each candidate the "direction to build a more literate America." They felt that only presidential leadership could ensure that the basic literacy needs of every American are met.

George Bush and Michael Dukakis wrote articles that appeared side by side in Phi Delta Kappan magazine at the time of the 1988 presidential campaign, outlining their respective "strategies for excellence in education." While Bush mentioned illiteracy only in terms of schooling and prevention (despite Barbara Bush's active involvement in the literacy movement), Dukakis listed six warning signs that America is losing its lead in education; one of these was that 25 million adult Americans are unable to read. He called

elimination of adult illiteracy one of the top priorities facing America. In the Dukakis administration, he proposed, the Secretary of Education would work with states to fight illiteracy by adding literacy services and improving existing ones; the federal government would provide seed money (to be matched by the private sector) to carry out these tasks. Dukakis also called for a Citizens Literacy Corps, an "army" of volunteers, to be funded at $24 million (Bush, 1988; Dukakis, 1988).

Brizius (1989) said that the President should increase efforts to raise public consciousness about the literacy issue through the media. But he should know that "awareness alone creates a demand for services that will not be met unless additional resources and efforts are focused on enhancing adult literacy."

CONCLUSION

An examination of the academic literature on adult illiteracy in the United States has revealed a high level of awareness of both the extent and seriousness of the problem. While estimates of the number of illiterates varied significantly depending on the writer's definition, all sources consulted acknowledged that there *is* an adult literacy problem and that something needs to be done.

My choice to study only federal adult literacy programs was motivated by constraints of time and space. But it was also a result of my belief that an adult literacy effort must originate at the federal level if the problem is to be effectively tackled.

In my preliminary literature search, I found mention of hundreds of state, local, and industrial programs, held in schools, libraries, churches,

community centers, and the work place. Yet despite the efforts of these programs, as few as 3% of those who seriously lack basic skills are being reached (Kozol, 1985b); many of the individuals who do attend programs never complete them (Mezirow et al., 1975). The problems outlined above, ranging from recruitment difficulties to need for technology, are too many to be dealt with on a small scale.

Surely an effort coordinated and "energized" by the federal government, to use the words of Chisman (1989), would stand a greater chance of success than the many worthy yet minuscule and fragmented programs that now exist. A nationally stated policy and a specially created Office for Adult Literacy, located *outside* the Department of Education, could organize, coordinate, and bring out the best in these already-existing programs.

While I do not claim to have an answer, I do believe that the extensive system of ABE classes that exists nationwide could be used as the basis for a new system of adult literacy education. Local and other programs could be subsumed into the ABE system, bringing the knowledge they have gained about the special needs of their particular area.

While ABE is a good effort, further steps must be taken to reach the intended target audience--the illiterate poor--and to keep them in the programs once they are attracted. Research on learning styles and increased use of new technologies could certainly ease this task.

A problem I have personally encountered is that of the high school graduate who has serious difficulties reading and writing, as in the case of the young man who sued his school system. For two and a half years I have tutored a man who has a high school diploma yet reads at a fourth-grade level. It has not been the purpose of this paper to mount an attack on the education

system of this country; however, it is shameful that such individuals are passed through our school systems only to face life with a serious disability. We must at this stage, then, also make an effort to reach the high school graduates whose reading skills are deficient. ABE programs, which are available to people who lack "the basic skills to enable them to function effectively in society" (NACAE, 1985), should be more widely publicized to reach these individuals. Only when the United States government can honestly say that every single individual who lacks reading skills is aware of the opportunity for help, can it consider its task well under way.

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